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Embattled Sprague quits slay panel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House assassinations committee accepted the resignation of embattled chief counsel Richard A. Sprague today with several members charging he was driven out by false charges, a witch hunt and character assassination.

Sprague said he resigned in the hope that his departure would impel the House to extend the committee's life in a vote later today. Some members said they agreed to accept the resignation out of respect for Sprague's desire. If the vote fails, the panel dies at midnight tomorrow.

The committee was set up to investigate the killings of President John F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

At their meeting this morning, committee members insisted that Sprague resigned voluntarily and was not asked to step aside after an informal House vote count indicated the panel would be killed off if he remained.

Bitter resentment surfaced in the House this week to Sprague's surviving his feud with former chairman Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.), who resigned earlier this month after the committee refused to support his efforts to fire Sprague.

At least five committee members angrily accused Gonzalez of making false charges against Sprague and using what one called McCarthy-like tactics to drive Sprague out of office. Gonzalez contended that Sprague refused to cut costs after the House rejected his proposed $6.5 million a year budget and tried to undermine Gonzalez's authority over the staff.

Gonzalez could not immediately be reached for comment.

Sprague had contended he needed the money because he could not use FBI or CIA investigators since the role of those agencies was part of the probe. Since then, a $2.5-million budget for this year was agreed upon by Sprague and the committee.